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Management Development in the Networked Library

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Abstract

Information technology has transformed library and information services. Distinctive features of the electronic library include the shift towards self-service modes of delivery, with distributed access to networked resources, and a focus on the end user and tailored provision to meet particular client needs. Implicit in this model is a switch from print-based materials to new multimedia sources. The role of information specialists is changing from searcher/information provider to facilitator, adviser or consultant in information management. User education trends reflect these developments with the integration of information skills instruction into the teaching/learning process associated with project work and specific assignments.

The impact of the convergence of computing and telecommunications technologies extends beyond information systems and service strategies. New patterns of service require new styles of provision, necessitating new imperatives for staff development and training, as well as a review of organizational structures that may no longer be relevant. Management styles are changing alongside service developments, typically featuring flatter, more flexible structures; wider participation in policy-making and decision-taking; the use of task forces to review and develop services; devolved financial responsibility and improved planning and performance measurement. Total Quality Management is a philosophy ideally suited to the library of the future.

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Introduction

In choosing the title for my paper, I have deliberately used the phrase "networked" library rather than the more popular "electronic" library, both to remind us that libraries - even in their futuristic self-service mode - are essentially about people, and to focus our thoughts on the human aspects of management. The pace of change, significantly driven by technological developments, has tended to concentrate attention on technical advances; human resource issues have not been entirely overlooked, but they have too often been treated as an afterthought. There is a real danger that many academic and other types of libraries will wake up to this fact so late that they will face a continuing uphill struggle to redress the balance. The opportunity is here to ensure that we not only realize the full benefits of the electronic campus, but also enjoy the process.

This paper will touch on several related themes - staff development, management structures and styles, and strategic leadership - but will begin with a quick survey of environmental influences to set the context for subsequent discussion. More significantly, I want to highlight some underlying issues: the need to put people first, as already indicated; the need, also, to close the yawning gap between aspiration and achievement; and in addition, the need to consider the holistic nature of management and to recognize that it is not only our services and operations which are interdependent - none of the topics mentioned can be treated in isolation.

Setting the Scene

The *environmental factors* currently having an impact on libraries are well known and have been fully documented elsewhere. In the United Kingdom they include: constrained or reduced budgets, particularly brought about by substantial cuts in public expenditure; escalating costs of library materials, with book and periodical prices rising at a level well above that of general inflation; significant growth in the supply of and

demand for information, exacerbated by the advent of new media and electronic publishing; convergence of computing and telecommunications technologies, widening the options for service delivery and blurring the roles of libraries and computer centres within organizations; promotion of the concept of tradeable information, accompanied by the creation of a sizeable private sector information broking industry; emphasis on accountability and value for money; focus on quality and customer care. In the higher education sector, academic and research libraries face dramatic expansion in student numbers over the next five years (without a corresponding increase in financial resources) and also changes in teaching and learning patterns and practices. In addition, institutions are being required to co-operate and to compete with each other at the same time.

The situation in other parts of the world displays remarkably similar characteristics. For example, a series of workshops organized during 1991 by the US Research Libraries Group for university provosts and library directors identified the following list of emerging trends (which are not in any order of priority).¹

EMERGING TRENDS

- * Developing the National Research and Education Network
- * Strengthening undergraduate education
- * Increasingly constrained budgets
- * Proliferating information sources and spiraling costs of materials
- * Pressing space and facilities maintenance needs
- * Changing scholarly communication system
- * Expanding international studies and programs
- * Increasing interdependence of library and computing center
- * Decreasing prestige of higher education in society
- * Growing difficulties in recruiting and retaining personnel
- * Shifting student demographics
- * Building relationships with the commercial sector
- * Growing importance of government relations

Preferred futures for libraries. RLG, 1991

The factors outlined above have had a significant impact on *trends and developments in library and information services* in the UK and elsewhere. Reduced budgets combined with the steep rise in literature costs and increased demand for information have caused many libraries to make more use of interlibrary loans and remote document supply services, characterized as a move away from a "holdings" (or "ownership") strategy to an "access" (or "demand") strategy. New information technologies have not only offered a wider range of bibliographic services but have fundamentally changed the style of service provision. CD-ROM products have proved popular with both library staff and users as a cost-effective, user-friendly means of conducting database searches. In many libraries this has led to a decrease in the volume of online searches - and also a further increase in interlibrary loan requests - with end users being able to carry out their own searches, rather than relying on library staff to act as intermediaries. There has also been more emphasis lately on full-text (as opposed to bibliographic) databases, improving the scope of services available to users.

The requirement for library managers to demonstrate value for money has tended to focus attention on providing services to meet specific user/customer needs, and there has been widespread adoption of commercial marketing techniques in the design, development and delivery of information services, tailored to the needs of particular client groups. The trend towards treating information as a tradeable commodity, combined with financial and other pressures, has led some academic and public libraries to introduce new fee-based information services, often specifically aimed at the local business community; other libraries have felt obliged to impose charges for existing services to their primary users, which were previously provided free.

Technological developments have given library managers a wider range of options from which they can select the best mix of facilities and services to meet the needs of their customers in the most cost-effective manner. Previously, the quality of a library tended to be judged on the basis of the size of its collections of books, journals and other materials; today, the emphasis has shifted from collections to services, to the delivery of documents and other information to the customer, irrespective of its origin. The concept of the electronic library offering direct access to users from their own desktops is a reality. In practice, few libraries wish to abandon completely the traditional role of collecting and housing material, but already there are examples of institutions (such as

Aston University) which have adopted a deliberate strategy of combining a much reduced locally-held core collection to meet primary needs with rapid and comprehensive access to external sources, identified through a range of information services and backed up by an effective document supply service.

The options can be viewed as a *spectrum of library models*, from the traditional reference and lending libraries through value-added information services and self-service facilities to the networked library, providing access to local, national and international resources from remote locations and fulfilling the role of an information gateway or electronic switching centre. (The models are not mutually exclusive - most libraries contain elements from more than one.) The shift towards the self-service library has enabled a redefinition of the role of academic subject librarians or information specialists, with a change of focus from carrying out searches and providing basic skills training to advising on search systems and strategies, contributing to teaching programmes alongside academic staff, and offering services more akin to consultancy in information management.

The management implications of the trends and developments indicated are profound and have affected libraries at a more fundamental level than simply extending the range of service options. In his recent review of academic library management, James Thompson (Librarian of Birmingham University) identifies a number of distinct shifts in style and emphasis that can be traced back over several decades to their origin with the progressive automation of library housekeeping systems in the 1960s: autocratic management giving way to a group or team approach, recognizing the specialist knowledge needed; a more disciplined approach to costing library operations, necessary to secure funding for expensive projects; a move away from compartmentalization towards corporate/organizational thinking as previously separate library operations began to converge through automation; redefinition of the division of labour - the responsibilities and duties of so-called professional and non-professional staff - resulting in the upgrading of library assistants' skills and the assumption of a more entrepreneurial role for librarians; and an enhanced profile for the library within the institution as it became a major computer user.² This analysis suggests that while government pressures and general management trends have undoubtedly added impetus to the development of a more "managerial" approach to

librarianship, computerization has in itself been a major determinant of the path followed.

Staff Development and Training

It is a truth universally acknowledged that staff development is "a good thing", and its critical importance in managing change has been duly publicized. There is no shortage of literature on the subject; the range of external courses, seminars and workshops on offer has never been broader; and many libraries can point to substantial in-house provision. Nevertheless, evidence on the ground suggests that there is a significant gap between aspiration and achievement: the feeling persists among many library staff - even in libraries which have invested substantially in staff development - that they are simply not given the opportunities to enable them to achieve their full potential, nor to contribute to the effective development and delivery of services. Identification of the topics and issues that must be covered is relatively straightforward; selecting appropriate methods or styles of delivery is more complex; but ensuring efficacy remains the ultimate challenge.

Information technology developments have obvious implications for specific skills training, which must cover: the use of library automation modules for acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, interlibrary loans and serials control; instruction in searching online and CD-ROM databases, and the use of communications packages and personal bibliographic management software; and also office automation software for word processing, spreadsheets, graphics, desktop publishing, electronic mail, etc. Professional updating is needed to ensure that staff are aware of relevant aspects of copyright regulations (especially in the context of "electrocopying") and data protection legislation, and also keep abreast of developments in cataloguing, indexing, and other technical specialisms. Other competencies required of library and information personnel today extend beyond the topics traditionally covered in professional education and training and include subjects typically found in business and management courses, such as financial management/management accounting, strategic planning, marketing, human resource (personnel) management, organization behaviour and culture, as well as a range of personal and interpersonal skills (e.g. time management, report writing, public speaking, negotiating techniques, team leadership and motivation).

The holistic nature of management can be illustrated here by considering the range of competencies associated with managing a library cost centre. A typical course in management accounting might include different types of accounts, budgeting techniques and costing methods, as well as internal control mechanisms and investment appraisal techniques. But the cost centre manager also needs to have some knowledge of strategic and operational planning, familiarity with local management information systems, and an understanding of output measurement and performance indicators. Personal computing (e.g. spreadsheets) and negotiating skills will also come in useful, as will an appreciation of motivation theory in relation to target-setting and the behavioural aspects of budgeting.

A more controversial question centres on who needs to be trained/developed in what areas. The sharp divide which used to separate "professional" and "non-professional" work is gradually disappearing as support staff take on more demanding tasks (notably as a result of automation) and their key position in managing the customer interface is properly acknowledged. Libraries are essentially about team work, and all our staff need both technical expertise and people-oriented skills because of the interactive nature of their work. Training in personal effectiveness and interpersonal skills, which is receiving increasing emphasis in management development programmes, is of fundamental and central importance to all library staff. Oral and written communication skills, interviewing and negotiating techniques, the ability and willingness to work as a team, are needed by front-line staff and senior managers alike. Time management, personal computing skills, performance measurement and project management tools are applicable at every level of library work. The general move towards participative management has encouraged wider discussion of strategy and tactics and acknowledged the valuable contribution that front-line staff are capable of making to decision-taking, especially in areas such as marketing and public relations. Thus the clear-cut distinction previously drawn between professional and non-professional is no longer valid; instead, we are increasingly seeing everyone contributing his or her own expertise to the delivery of a professional service, while still recognizing that the level of knowledge and skills required will vary according to individual job specialisms.

Methods of delivery are also evolving in response to changing needs with a marked shift towards work-based learning (either on-the-job or off-the-

job) using - for example - case studies, role plays and special projects for individuals or groups, in preference to more passive modes such as lectures or seminars. Other means of developing people include job rotation, staff exchanges or placements, counselling and mentoring relationships. At Aston, we have found that in-house tailored workshops can have advantages over standard external programmes in being context-specific, encouraging pragmatism and enabling participants to focus on outcomes, often with some follow-up action built in to the process. In addition to successfully addressing particular issues, more generally they can facilitate team-building and usefully foster a participative management style. We also regularly use project groups to develop plans and ideas that may lead to changes in Library & Information Services' (LIS) policy and services; such groups can help staff without formal line management responsibilities to develop team leadership abilities. Project work also offers an opportunity to introduce planning and budgeting techniques to a wider range of staff, and it certainly tests time management capabilities and interpersonal skills. The deliberately non-hierarchical cross-divisional nature of the groups again encourages participation and also serves to improve communication between different sections.

Much thought has been given recently to the infrastructure needed to support such activities, highlighting the importance of *top management commitment*, as evidenced by a formal policy statement, the appointment of a senior member of staff as co-ordinator, and allocation of sufficient resources - both money and time. Policies and programmes will not produce results without genuine commitment - not just compliance - on the part of all concerned. The critical factor here is getting the message across that staff development and training must be a *continuous process* and a *shared responsibility* between the individual and the organization; it is not a luxury to be dropped when the budget is under pressure. The library's human resources strategy must be an integral part of its overall strategy. Line managers must understand that they are responsible for ensuring the development of relevant skills and knowledge by their staff, and that this is their key task as enablers, motivators and supporters. Individuals in turn need to understand that an active/proactive approach on their part is essential to the process, and to see action-based learning on the job as a fruitful opportunity for development. A model produced by researchers at Ashridge Management College for its "Management for the future" project offers a useful illustration of the different ways managers perceive training and development.³

Fragmented approach	Formalized approach	Focused approach
<p>Training is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * a cost not an investment * not linked to organizational goals * perceived as a luxury * directive * in training department * primarily knowledge-based courses * about training not development 	<p>Training is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * systematic - part of planned career development * linked to human resource needs * linked to appraisal - individual needs * knowledge-based courses plus focus on skills * linked to career development * carried out by trainers and line managers * linked to job by pre-post-course work 	<p>Training and development is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * a continuous learning process * essential for business survival * a competitive weapon * linked to organizational strategy and individual goals * on-the-job + specialist courses * self-selected * usually non-directive, novel methods * line managers' responsibility * tolerant

Some libraries have not moved beyond the "fragmented" approach, others have progressed to the "formalized" stage, but only a few even begin to approach the "focused" model. At Aston, we have recently produced a Staff Development and Training Policy Statement, which confirms our adoption of the focused approach and clarifies our policy in relation to individuals' future career needs, as well as setting out the roles and responsibilities of the Director, Head of Management Services, line managers, individual staff and the University's Staff Development Office. We plan shortly to experiment with a Self Managed Learning programme (following the approach pioneered at Roffey Park Management College in Sussex) using "learning contracts" with staff working in small groups or "sets", facilitated by an adviser. This particular approach bears some resemblance to the Framework for Continuing Professional Development, recently launched by the UK Library Association, based on a "personal profile" workbook.⁴ However, Self Managed Learning is

arguably a more rigorous - and rewarding - method, and constitutes a management development exercise in itself, as the learning process is designed to replicate the real process of managing.

Structures and Styles

In order to secure the sort of commitment which will help a library to become a "learning organization", it may be necessary to look at aspects of organizational structure and culture. Many libraries are organized and managed in a way that quite clearly inhibits learning and development; others are moving away from the traditional hierarchies and division between professional and "non-professional" staff, introducing flatter structures and devolved budgeting, using matrix management, and aiming to create a supportive climate - one which welcomes experiment, provides feedback, accepts mistakes, respects the individual, and encourages questioning of the status quo. In a thought-provoking review of library management styles and structures, Maurice Line points out that a proliferation of grades does not necessarily require a corresponding number of levels in the hierarchy, drawing attention to the tendency in the public sector to make this assumption.⁵ He advocates a non-hierarchical style, if the structure cannot be satisfactorily dismantled. At Aston, we have recently flattened our structure by deleting the post of Assistant Director and creating a senior management team which comprises the Director and four senior colleagues on different grades - some on the same grade as colleagues who are not members of this team, but have substantial functional and staff management responsibilities. In addition, we have delegated financial responsibility, through a system of devolved cost centres, giving staff responsible for delivering services control of appropriate resources.

Hierarchical structures have been typically associated with poor communications and slow decision-making, stifling individuality and creativity, encouraging compartmentalization and grade/status-conscious behaviour. In particular, hierarchies are thought to inhibit change, thus making them unsuited to the turbulent environment in which libraries currently operate. An alternative to the traditional hierarchy is the matrix structure, which in contrast acknowledges the interdependency of library operations, and can assist co-ordination, facilitate team work, enable more rapid responses, promote flexibility, foster individual initiative and - especially important - allow innovation.

There can be benefits in introducing some elements of matrix management, within a more traditional structure - not least because this allows a more manageable, evolutionary approach to bringing about change. We have done this at Aston in the systems area, where the Head of Systems manages a team of senior and support staff responsible for the day-to-day operation and planned development of our library housekeeping system, drawn from different sections of LIS. In a less formal manner, our project groups (referred to above) fulfil a similar function, and these limited-life groups may be reconstituted as permanent teams after the project phase is completed if we see a need for a continuing cross-divisional focus on particular services or activities (such as our Reading Lists team, which involves staff from Information Services and Acquisitions). Beyond LIS, we are adopting an informal matrix structure working with colleagues in Information Systems (IS) and in academic departments to achieve a more integrated approach to supporting and encouraging the use of bibliographic and other information systems. We envisage the formation of learning/research support teams, whereby the relevant LIS Information Specialist and IS IT Specialist work with Departmental Computer Officers to provide integrated guidance and support to staff and students.

Strategic Management

Numerous authors have commented on the purpose and benefits of strategic planning for libraries. Formal plans are often required by libraries' parent institutions or funding agencies, notably to support requests for financial resources. Planning provides a framework for policy-making and decision-taking, which forms the basis for subsequent actions. By documenting and publishing their plans, libraries can communicate their mission and objectives to both internal and external audiences; they can thus educate the community, raise their profile and gain visibility with key opinion formers. Consulting the various stakeholders and encouraging their participation in the planning process helps to secure relationships with other parts of the organization. Creating a shared understanding of the library's purpose also tends to strengthen commitment and improve morale of library staff, and the planning process itself can be used as a team-building and staff development exercise (developing abilities in data collection/analysis, creative thinking, writing, etc).

Strategic management emphasizes the systematic management of discontinuous change, acknowledging the need for continuous monitoring of a rapidly-changing environment, rethinking and reordering of priorities based on environmental issues. Its importance for libraries in today's difficult and turbulent times is obvious. The planning process involves a number of key steps or phases, some conducted in sequence, others in parallel: analyzing the external environment, to establish the operational context; appraising the library itself, and its parent organization; assessing the needs of existing and potential users, i. e. the market; creating/reviewing the library's vision, mission, objectives and goals; identifying major directions or "key result areas"; formulating strategies, together with costed action plans and performance indicators; communicating plans to all library staff, the parent institution, customers and the wider community; implementing, monitoring and evaluating progress against objectives and environmental influences. As work proceeds and new information becomes available, earlier ideas may need rethinking and it may be necessary to repeat steps several times. Strategic planning is essentially an iterative and interactive team process, involving people at all levels.

All the available evidence from libraries suggests that a participative approach to planning leads to a much better result, in respect of both the content of plans and commitment to their implementation. While all the steps indicated are important, probably the most crucial are those relating to the development of a strategic focus: clarifying the desired future state, and the purpose and distinctive approach of the library; setting out broad objectives and specific goals; and articulating key result areas. It can take a long time to develop and formulate such statements, particularly if managers are intent on combining "top-down" guidance with "bottom-up" input, and ensuring that the outcome is acceptable to all concerned. However, experience shows that this is time well spent: if there is general agreement within the library on the overall strategy, operational decisions can be successfully delegated to an appropriate level and actions taken quickly, to the mutual benefit of staff and users. Without this framework, a management style emphasizing delegation and participation may be a recipe for disaster as there will be a multiplicity of views on the library's purpose and priorities. At Aston, we have recently invested a lot of time in the above processes; we now have agreed vision and mission statements, as well as a list of "critical success factors", defined here as a list of "distinct and specific issues, which taken together are necessary and sufficient to accomplish the mission".

TQM

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a philosophy - a way of life - which is increasingly being adopted by all types of organizations, including libraries and information units. At Aston, the formulation of our vision and mission statements and identification of our critical success factors was undertaken as part of a wider University initiative to introduce TQM throughout the institution. TQM assigns the highest priority to the satisfaction of customer needs. The essence of TQM is that quality is everyone's responsibility; it is characterized by customer orientation, employee involvement and continuous improvement of products and services, and thus merits the description of a managerial approach ideally suited to the library of the future. TQM also has its detractors; many critics argue that far from representing a total solution, it is simply the latest management fad, ultimately destined to go the same way as other management fashions (such as scientific management and management by objectives). TQM's mixed press can partly be attributed to the confusion of various different approaches to quality management which are currently being promoted. In a paper produced for the UK Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, Professor Sir Frederick Crawford (Vice-Chancellor of Aston) draws a crucial distinction between "quality" and "standards", pointing out the essential difference between the implementation of TQM and compliance with quality assurance standards, such as the British Standard 5750 (or ISO 9000), which can be likened to the distinction between religion and law, "TQM is about aspirations that can only be approached, without perfection ever being achieved; it is not about satisfying the minimum specified standards that one can get away with".⁶

The basic idea of meeting customer requirements and getting it right first time is deceptively simple, but in order to achieve this we need to address a whole range of complex areas - including strategy, structures, systems, staff, skills, style and shared values; and issues such as leadership, commitment, ownership, team work, trust and pride. The core concepts of TQM can be summarized as an holistic approach to management, with the focus on the customer, managers acting as role models, everyone involved, synergy in team work, ownership and self-management, and (as emphasized above) continuous improvement. In short, TQM is concerned with all the areas already identified as being at the heart of the management challenges facing the networked library. Experience at Aston suggests that TQM can be an effective vehicle for change, but it

must not be seen as a "quick fix". We are taking things forward slowly, concentrating on areas where success is essential, improvement is necessary and/or concerted effort will bring the greatest benefit. We have used a variety of tools and techniques in projects undertaken to date, including carrying out a detailed analysis (using flow charts) of the book acquisitions process; holding a brainstorming session to devise ways of improving services to part-time and distance-learning students; and establishing a Quality Circle to monitor and review our public enquiry services.

Although we are still at the very early stages of implementation, we feel that we have already derived significant benefits from TQM: it has helped us to clarify our vision and mission, and to identify our most critical processes; it has provided a rationale for developing performance indicators; it has encouraged participation and team work; and it has given an added impetus to service development. To sum up, TQM is assisting us with the three key issues identified at the outset: it is enabling us to gain a better understanding of the holistic nature of management, to close the gap between aspiration and achievement, and (most important of all) to put people - colleagues and customers - first.

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